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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 NICOSIA 000213

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SUBJECT: Cyprus Steps Up Anti-Trafficking Efforts

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In recent meetings with authorities and NGO representatives involved in the fight against trafficking in persons (TIP), EmbOffs and visiting Desk Officer witnessed increased efforts and new initiatives. In the south, the GOC has taken concrete steps to fulfill the "Three P's" -- Prosecution, Protection, and Prevention -- with repeated successes in the first and notable strides in the last. North of the Green Line there is less activity, although Turkish Cypriot "officials" voice commitment to combating TIP and appear open to USG cooperation and guidance. End summary.

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Better Late Than Never  
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¶2. (SBU) EmbOffs and visiting Cyprus Desk Officer met GOC officials February 14-16 to discuss Cyprus's anti-TIP efforts over the last 12 months and to stress (again) that concrete action would be necessary if the country is to move off of the Watch List.

¶3. (SBU) Interior Ministry Senior Advisor Georgios Georgallis outlined several steps the GOC has taken since last year's report. Comprehensive anti-TIP legislation had been "finalized" -- part of the formal legal process -- and would soon be sent by the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to the GOC Council of Ministers, which would in turn refer it to the House of Representatives for passage. Georgallis also said that the former prison director's estate was being prepped as the first publicly-supported shelter on the island. Finally, according to Georgallis, both the MOI and Police (under the Ministry of Justice and Public Order) had produced and (at least partially) launched public awareness and demand-reduction campaigns. (Note: The MOI serves as the GOC "anti-TIP interagency coordinator." End note.)

¶4. (SBU) Georgallis assured EmbOffs that combating TIP remained a top GOC priority. Engagement by officials at the highest levels, he said, had kicked the bureaucracy into gear and begun to produce real results. He pointed to increased prosecutions under current anti-TIP legislation and a 28 percent decrease from 2003 to 2006 in the number of "artiste"-category work permits issued. Such work permits, Georgallis added, would henceforth be sent to the Cypriot embassy/consulate in the worker's home country (rather than to the Cypriot nightclub/pub employer as was previously the practice), giving consular staff the opportunity to inform foreign women of their rights before they traveled to Cyprus. He predicted greater GOC interagency cooperation now that an internal handbook on identification and referral procedures had been approved and widely distributed. Just as importantly, he contended, GOC agencies with anti-TIP responsibilities would continue to cooperate with the Embassy and with local NGOs, such as Stigma's shelter in Limassol, founded by Orthodox priest Father Savvas. Separately, Father Savvas described to us his solid working relationship with the police. (Note: Embassy has likewise had a good working relationship

with all GOC agencies over the last year. End note.)

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Winning on Prosecutions  
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15. (U) Rita Superman, head of the Police Office to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, praised her government's record in arresting, prosecuting and convicting traffickers. In the last 12 months, 79 trafficking victims were identified (only 56 last year), and police investigated 60 TIP cases (up from 47 last year). Of the 10 cases from this year that reached conclusion, four traffickers were convicted, receiving four to nine months imprisonment. Of the 26 cases from previous years that finally reached conclusion, 13 traffickers (a noteworthy 50 percent) were convicted.

16. (SBU) Superman also reiterated that the Police would support and cooperate with the privately-funded Stigma shelter in Limassol. Law enforcement authorities had turned the corner on what was previously a rocky relationship, she claimed. Father Savvas, separately confirmed the new attitude among police. In prior years, he had complained about police harassing him, but now he thanked police for protecting him from nightclub/pub owners/managers and praised Superman's unit specifically for formalizing and implementing a referral system with his shelter.

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A Shelter to Call Home  
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17. (SBU) Social Welfare officials proudly showcased February 16 the GOC-owned building and grounds that will serve as a shelter for trafficking victims. They reported that steps were already underway for staffing, security upgrades and re-decoration. The facility,

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scheduled to open at the end of March, was previously used as the residence of the Director of the Central Prison in Nicosia. Though adjacent to the prison grounds, Superman actually felt that its location may be a deterrent to victims' former "impresarios," who might think twice about stalking or harassing them in the shadow of the prison and within sight of law enforcement. The four-bedroom, colonial-style house is surrounded by a large yard. With minor changes, it will accommodate up to 15 foreign women at a time. Social Welfare officials told us that the shelter will operate under a one-year trial basis, and its operations will be assessed quarterly until the government feels it can safely transfer management of the publicly-supported facility to an NGO.

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Shining Light on the Problem  
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18. (SBU) Of the Three P's, prevention -- namely, public awareness and demand reduction campaigns -- long had been the weakest link in Cypriot efforts to combat TIP. Recently, however, we have seen improvement, due in part to international attention and pressure. The Council of Europe (COE) and the GOC co-hosted an anti-TIP conference in Nicosia February 15-16, prompting the MOI to unveil an unprecedented and large-scale public awareness campaign. The campaign will go into full swing by the end of March, with some 50,000 flyers and 800 posters being distributed. Georgallis told us that the GOC had acquired broadcasting rights to a United Nations-produced public service announcement, which would be aired on state TV during primetime as soon as the final cut of the video is received from the UN.

19. (U) Police, meanwhile, have launched their own public awareness campaign, with 10,000 flyers already distributed door-to-door by 39 community police officers. The police report that trafficking-related calls to their hotline have increased significantly, attributable to the campaign. For last year's report, they could only count 68 calls; this year's report will record 104.

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And Miles to Go Before....

10. (SBU) Although the GOC has made strides to meet basic anti-TIP norms in recent months, there are still several major projects the government has yet to tackle, according to the few local NGOs working in this field. Publicly and in private meetings with us, representatives from the NGOs Action for Equality, Support, and Anti-racism (KISA, in Greek) and Stigma blasted the GOC maintaining a separate work permit category for nightclub "artistes." Foreign women entering Cyprus as artistes, the NGOs complained, are barred from changing employment sectors unless identified by the police as trafficking victims. Of the eight foreign women interviewed by our visiting Desk Officer at the Stigma shelter, for example, most had not anticipated prostitution as part of their employment in Cyprus. Our NGO contacts pointed out that the GOC's own May 2005 National Action Plan specifically called for the abolishment of the artiste category, but that the Migration Department (under the MOI) opposed the change -- ostensibly to protect this group of temporary foreign workers, whose employment conditions render them vulnerable to exploitation by nightclub/pub owners/managers.

Diverging Roads?

11. (SBU) Our February 15 meetings with "officials" and NGOs in the Turkish Cypriot-administered north were discouraging; they have accomplished little to combat TIP. "Interior Ministry Undersecretary" Ali Alnar, the "anti-TIP interagency coordinator," admitted that the area administered by Turkish Cypriots lagged far behind the government-controlled area in all of the "Three P's." However, he stated, "we are open to USG suggestions" on how to combat the global TIP problem. (Comment: This admission was a small step forward. In previous meetings, Alnar was confused by, and uninterested in, the differences between human trafficking and alien smuggling. End comment.) Alnar promised that resources would be made available for further anti-TIP initiatives, as had been done for the Turkish Cypriots' 24/7 TIP victim helpline, already staffed with a Russian-speaking nurse. The Turkish Cypriot side would launch a large-scale public awareness campaign to promote the 24/7 helpline, Alnar declared.

12. (SBU) Alnar also reacted positively to suggestions that Turkish Cypriot authorities contact (and benefit from the expertise of) officials in Ankara. He was also receptive to the idea of a publicly-funded shelter and to greater official support for (and

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cooperation with) local NGOs. When we raised concerns about immigration police holding the passports and travel documents/tickets of artistes, Alnar explained that this policy was "for the women's protection." Otherwise, he contended, "nightclub owners might take the passports away." This also made it easier to repatriate these foreign women in the event they asked to leave the country. In fact, 235 women had been repatriated with the help of the police. Alnar expressed a willingness to change this policy immediately, however, if that was what international anti-TIP norms required. Alnar boasted that the current "government," which took office in 2004, had issued no new nightclub permits. Only on the need for anti-TIP legislation did Alnar take issue, claiming that trafficking was a problem limited to only some artistes working northern Cyprus. Current legislation, he claimed, could adequately deal with such cases.

13. (SBU) Anti-TIP activists, however, were quick to discount the "government's" willingness to tackle trafficking. In her meeting with us, anti-TIP NGO Prologue Consulting's Mine Yucel claimed that Turkish Cypriot "officials" were utterly disinterested in the problem. Yucel, who in December 2006 concluded a USG-funded study on the extent of the TIP problem in Cyprus's north, complained that Turkish Cypriot authorities were not making any efforts to combat or even acknowledge the existence of TIP. Yucel accused the authorities of turning a blind eye to what goes on at nightclubs, and added that they have not cooperated or even contacted the few local NGOs in the north that are concerned with the TIP issue.

Despite her close relationship with the ruling party, Emine Erk, civil rights attorney and Chairwoman of the Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Foundation, agreed with Yucel's assessment of "government"-NGO relations. Admitting that she lacked complete information on the condition or status of foreign women at the nightclubs, Erk nonetheless suggested that the "cabarets" represented the bulk of the north's trafficking problem. Her organization was not aware of any other form of trafficking, particularly forced labor, in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

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Comment  
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114. (SBU) This round of TIP-related meetings reconfirmed our previous observation that, although GOC arrest/prosecution/conviction efforts have increased consistently over the years, the government needs to devote more resources to the implementation of other key initiatives outlined in its own National Action Plan. There has been much recent activity in the other two "P's," however, which we will continue to encourage. The Ambassador will meet March 19 with Interior Minister Neoclis Sylikiotis to applaud the progress made, but to press the matter further. We hope to be able to verify by the March 31 TIP reporting period deadline whether the GOC has followed through with its plans for more comprehensive anti-TIP legislation, a publicly-supported shelter in Nicosia, and a large-scale public awareness campaign. Regarding the Turkish Cypriot-administered area, its failing performance in all of the "Three P's" is frankly disheartening, and occasional Turkish Cypriot promises to do more mostly have fallen flat. If the Turkish Cypriot-administered area were given a hypothetical tier ranking, it would certainly fall behind the government-controlled areas -- whose recent anti-TIP efforts merit praise. End comment.

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